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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KIGALI 000874

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SUBJECT: RPF FLEXES ITS MUSCLES DURING CONGRESS, CHALLENGES
WOULD-BE OPPONENTS

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Classified By: Ambassador W. Stuart Symington for reasons 1.4 (b) (d)

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: On December 12, approximately 2500 Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) members from across Rwanda held a party congress in Kigali to hear remarks by Rwandan president Paul Kagame and other senior figures and to elect individuals to fill party leadership slots. RPF rank and file nJF 6vM&QQ22Q4 renew Kagame's mandate as party chairman, and returned Christophe Bazivamo (minister of forestry and mines) and Francois Ngarambe to their positions as vice-chairman and secretary-general, respectively. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) During opening remarks at the congress, Kagame urged party members to uphold their promises to the population and encouraged them to speak freely and openly, to include challenging top RPF leaders. He said the RPF had invited representatives from all other political parties, but that "some" chose not to come for reasons of their own. (Note: The one who did not attend was Bernard Ntaganda of the Parti Social-Imberakuri, who told us afterward his political allies had already criticized him for joining the Political Party Forum, and that he did not want to attract further criticism by attending the RPF meeting as well. End Note.) Kagame added that "some RPF members" were invited even though they were planning to break with the party (NFI), declared that the RPF did not fear those who wanted to create their own parties, and said the Rwandan population would judge the RPF.

13. (SBU) After Kagame's remarks, leaders of other political parties spoke, and generally expressed support for the RPF and continued partnership with it. Internal Security Minister Musa Fazil Harerimana, leader of the Parti Democratique Ideal, asked rhetorically why anyone would dare to challenge the RPF at the polls, comparing it to hitting one's head against a wall. Senate President Vincent Biruta, leader of the Parti Social Democrate, said Rwanda was fortunate to have a government led by the RPF and Kagame. Youth Minister Protails Mitali, leader of the Parti Liberal, praised the RPF for its anti-genocide policy and its role in supporting genocide survivors. And Prime Minister Bernard Makuza, an independent, drew loud applause when he said the RPF and Kagame were the best choices to govern Rwanda.

14. (SBU) When it came time for the congress to vote its choices for party leadership positions, many members initially wanted to signal their choice for chairman, vice-chairman and secretary-general by applauding. Kagame argued against this, and after many minutes of debate, the congress agreed to cast votes by secret ballot. Initially, no one opposed Kagame for the chairman's slot; after Kagame chided the crowd over the lack of an challenger, Abdul Karim Harerimana stood up and offered his candidacy. (Note: Harerimana, a cabinet minister during the 1990s, is a member of the East African Legislative Assembly. He reportedly won two percent of the vote. End Note.) Bazivamo and Ngarambe ran unopposed. The congress also elected several members to serve as commissioners, including:
--ombudsman Tito Rutaremara (in the position since the RPF's birth)
--education minister Charles Murigande (a commissioner since 2002; secretary-general before that)
--senator Aloysia Inyumba (in the position since the late 1990s)
--head of gacaca courts Donatila Mukantaganzwa (in the position since 2005)
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--local government minister James Musoni (in the position since 2005)
--minister without portfolio Solina Nyirahabimana (in the position since 2005)
--electoral commission chairman Chrysologue Karangwa (in the position since 2005)
--senator Antoine Mugesera (in the position since 2005)
--member of parliament Bernadette Kanzayire (in the position since 2005)
--senator Joseph Karemera (new)
--member of parliament Abdul Karim Harerimana (new)
(Note: Kagame reportedly grimaced at the election of Karemera and others (NFI).)

15. (C) COMMENT: Although there was some speculation that Ngarambe's term would end, few observers expected major changes in RPF leadership with presidential elections due in August 2010. It was mildly surprising that congress did not decide on a presidential candidate-expected to be Kagame-given the size of the gathering. One possible

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explanation is that the RPF congress was sandwiched between two national-level events, the National Dialogue Conference and the Diaspora Conference, and that senior RPF leaders may have wanted to avoid charges of "politicizing" these two high-profile events, which were billed as being held in the name of all Rwandans. Another explanation is that the RPF leaders simply judge it wiser to wait until closer to the actual, short official campaign season (it will begin July 20, 2010) in order to maintain momentum and maximize turnout at the polls. As for Kagame's remarks about RPF members quitting, local rumor and the Kinyarwanda press speculated that these were directed at senator Karemera and Patrick Mazimhaka, a former minister and deputy African Union chairman, and that they may be behind the nascent Democratic Green Party of Rwanda and its efforts to register. END COMMENT.

SYMINGTON